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Citation for published version:

Boswell, C 2008, 'Evasion, Reinterpretation and Decoupling: European Commission Responses to the 'External Dimension' of Immigration and Asylum', *West European Politics*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 491-512.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380801939784>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/01402380801939784](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380801939784)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

West European Politics

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Evasion, Reinterpretation and Decoupling: European Commission Responses to the “External Dimension” of Immigration and Asylum

Abstract

Since 1999, the European Commission has been tasked with “integrating” immigration and asylum goals into the EU’s external relations. This article explores how different Directorate-Generals have responded to this requirement. Rejecting prevalent rationalist theories, it argues that administrative organizations are preoccupied with internal social and cognitive tasks, and only selectively read and respond to signals from their political environment. Depending on characteristics of the organization and policy area, we can hypothesize four ideal typical responses: full adaptation, evasion, institutional decoupling, and reinterpretation. An analysis of Commission responses suggests that DG Justice, Liberty and Security fully adapted to the agenda, while DG External Relations adopted a strategy of institutional decoupling. DG Development shifted from initial evasion to reinterpretation, which contributed to the rather incoherent mix of goals in the “Global Approach” that emerged in 2005. The article considers the implications of this account for theories of policy change.

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Evasion, Reinterpretation and Decoupling: European Commission Responses to the “External Dimension” of Immigration and Asylum

European Union activity in the area of Immigration and Asylum has seen a dramatic expansion since the 1990s. Much of the action has taken place outside of Union territory, under the rubric of the so-called “external dimension” of immigration asylum. The external dimension covers a range of measures to encourage or coerce third countries into controlling migration, readmitting irregular migrants, or assisting refugees. Originally focused on acceding and associated states, it has been exported to a wider circle of neighbours and countries further afield. Since 1999, the approach has also been extended to require the ‘integration’ of immigration and asylum questions into all areas of EU External Relations (European Council 1999). The idea is to readjust bilateral relations and development cooperation to take into account EU goals on migration management.

Several contributions have sought to account for the rapid growth of the external dimension. It has been explained as a response to the perceived failure of domestic approaches to migration control (Boswell 2003); as part of a wider ‘securitization’ of migration policy (Gabrielli 2006); or as an instance of ‘horizontal venue-shopping’ (Lavenex 2006). These accounts rest on familiar political science assumptions about the sources of policy change. They locate power in the preferences and actions of policy-makers in national governments. Policy-makers’ preferences are more or less inferable from an assumed interest in realizing official policy goals, or maximising control over a policy area. And political decisions and legislation are generally taken as an indicator of policy outcomes.

The contention of this article is that these political science approaches fail to capture important aspects of policy-making. They gloss over the complex organizational dynamics that mediate the elaboration and implementation of new policy programmes. More particularly, they neglect the special problems raised by the attempt to “integrate” new political goals into the activities of organizations in a different policy area. The role of administrative organizations in shaping policy outcomes is likely to be especially critical in cases where policy change involves a substantial reorientation of organizational ideology and goals. In such cases, different parts of the administration may exercise considerable weight in blocking the implementation of new approaches, or they may succeed in realigning goals.

This makes it crucial to explore the dynamics of organizational change within different parts of the Commission. What sorts of factors shape the interests of different Directorate-Generals, and how do they respond to pressure to adapt their political priorities? I will draw on organizational sociology and systems theory to develop a theory of how organizations internalise and act on political pressures from their environment. Such responses, I shall argue, can be grouped into four ideal types: full adaptation; institutional decoupling; reinterpretation; and evasion. The article applies this framework to help make sense of the responses of DGs Justice, Liberty and Security (JLS), External Relations (Relex), and Development since 1999. It draws on a variety of policy documents, speeches, and seventeen semi-structured interviews conducted with Commission officials from the three DGs in 2002, 2006 and 2007. The analysis finds that JLS approximates most closely to full adaptation, while Relex is closest to institutional decoupling. Most intriguing of the three, however, is DG Development, which appears to have shifted from evasion to reinterpretation. In the

final section, I will consider the implications both for theories of organizational change, and for the role of organizational dynamics in explaining policy outcomes.

Organizational Action and the European Commission

Theories of Organizational Action

Explanations of EU policy change have tended to neglect the organizational dynamics of the administration as a causal variable. Despite the recent “public administrative turn” in EU studies (Trondal 2006), most contributions have tended to focus on the dynamics of socialization or decision-making in bureaucracies as largely discrete phenomena (see, for example, Hooghe 2005; Cini 2006); or on the relationship between the EU and national bureaucracies (Kassim 2003; Goetz 2000). Where scholars have sought to incorporate these dynamics into models of policy change or explanations of policy outcomes, this is usually on the basis of essentially rationalist accounts (). Indeed, we can distinguish between two such accounts that tend to underlie theories of organizational action in political science. First is what can be broadly characterized as the Weberian account (Weber 1978: 971-5; see also Olsen 2003: 509-10). The key insight here is that bureaucracies are fundamentally output oriented: they are concerned with the realization of mandated goals. So if an organization within the administration is under clear political instructions to internalise a new ideology or set of practices, it is rational for it to adjust its output in the relevant way. This account would therefore explain organizational response to an external change in policy in terms of a rational adjustment triggered by a shift in the

bureaucracy's ascribed tasks. *Prima facie*, this would explain, for example, the integration of migration goals into external relations.

The second familiar way of theorizing the state administration is Foucauldian. On this account, the state administration is assumed to be interested in expanding its power in order to increase its control over the population (Foucault 1994: 216-7). Bureaucracies instrumentalize knowledge and practices that can help them to enhance societal control. So they are keen to adopt discourses and practices that will legitimize the use of more intrusive types of control, evade scrutiny from civil society, or give them access to more robust policy instruments. This aim of bypassing scrutiny has also been proffered as an explanation for attempts to employ external relations to control migration (Lavenex 2006; see also Guiraudon 2000).

The problem with both accounts is that they are based on a rather simplistic understanding of how organizations operate. They attribute to organizations a form of rationality which has been widely discredited within literature on organizational sociology. Nonetheless, these types of rationalist assumptions continue to permeate political science accounts of policy-making. In what follows, I briefly set out a rather different way of theorizing organizational action.

The first point to make is that organizational action should not be understood as derivative of a cumulation of rational individual action. Nor is it oriented exclusively (or even predominantly) towards the realisation of mandated goals, or power expansion. Rather, organizations develop distinctive beliefs and patterns of behaviour which help them deal with uncertainty, and generate loyalty amongst members (Brunsson 1985). This implies the emergence of routines and standard operating procedures that are often decoupled from criteria of efficient performance of formal goals (Meyer and Rowan 1991). So instead of helping realise Weberian

rationality or Foucauldian governmentality, these patterns of behaviour may be performing a number of other functions: helping to make sense of a complex environment, and reducing uncertainty by establishing roles that stabilise social identities and render behaviour more predictable (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). These functions can be understood in terms of both a social-psychological need for some stability of social roles and norms governing interaction (Feldman and March 1981: 177); as well as a cognitive requirement of simplifying a complex environment (Weick 1995: 86-7).

This latter point is well theorised by Niklas Luhmann. Luhmann's theory understands organizations as systems of communication, which adopt a series of binary coding to help map themselves and their environment (Luhmann 2003: 32). In modern welfare state systems, organizations are confronted with a huge increase in the range and complexity of tasks they need to fulfil, as well as increased complexity of operations in their environment that need to be taken into account. In order to cope with this complexity, systems of coding become more complicated and increasingly specific to particular organizations (Harste 2003). Indeed, coding becomes so specialised that it can only make sense of other systems in terms of its own system of communication. The result is that the system experiences external events or demands from its environment as noise or perturbations, which it can only understand and respond to through interpreting in the terms of the binary coding of its own system (Mingers 2003: 110). In this sense organizations are recursive systems, which can only make sense of their environments through patterns of coding already in operation in the system. The implication is that "There is no such thing as an independent reality that may influence an organization directly" (Luhmann 2003: 33). All that exists is the system's own understanding of this reality. This means that organizations only

selectively perceive and internalise the demands made by actors in their environments. They are first and foremost oriented towards meeting certain social psychological functions.

However, organizations are also concerned about their external legitimacy. For reasons mentioned above, they are keen to consolidate existing practices, routines and roles; and in order to do this, organizations recognise that they are more or less dependent on resources from their environments (Brunsson 1985). In the case of organizations within the state administration, this implies some preoccupation with meeting the expectations of key actors in the political system. So while administrative organizations may by fairly closed systems of communication, they cannot afford to ignore signals from those political actors whose support is considered crucial for organizational reproduction. Through multiple interactions, the political system relays certain requirements to the administration about how political programmes should be elaborated and implemented. It provides a set of signals to the administration about the directions the latter should pursue (Luhmann 1981). In the case of the European Commission, we should note that Directorate-Generals (DGs) within the Commission respond most systematically to signals from their political leaders (Commissioners). They may also feel the need to adjust their actions in direct response to signals from other actors in the political system, such as European Parliamentary committees, the Council of Ministers, or the European Council (although in many cases such claims will be internalised and channelled through the Commissioner heading the DG).

It is worth noting another important distinction between national and EU level: the degree of exposure to pressures from public opinion. The political leaders of national administrative departments (and, of course, national parliamentarians) are constantly engaged in trying to meet public expectations, which they ascertain

through reading signals about public opinion from the mass media. European Commissioners, by contrast, have relatively less exposure to this form of public claims-making. One reason for this is that the societal impacts of EU policies tend to be diffuse and are less intensively scrutinised by the media. Barring some exceptional cases, public perceptions of accountability for the most part locate responsibility at the national level. Even where the EU is attributed responsibility, the mass media will tend to target critique at national governments. This means that the Commission's political leaders are relatively abstracted from claims emanating from public opinion, or from the dynamics of party political mobilisation. Where such claims emerge, they are likely to be episodic, rising and falling in response to high-profile scandals or crises.

Organizational Responses to External Pressure

The picture that has emerged so far is one of Commission DGs as basically self-referential organizations, but which also perceive themselves to be more or less dependent on their political environment for legitimation. How, then, do different DGs interpret and respond to the various claims emanating from politics, and how do they prioritise them in relation to other competing claims – such as the need for internal cohesion to retain the loyalty of members?

We can point to three key variables that might shape these reactions. One is the extent to which a DG is sensitive to signals from its environment. Some organizations are quite aggressively geared towards securing legitimacy from their political environment. They are keen to show that they are responding to the demands of politics, in order to shore up support and consolidate legitimacy and resources. This is especially likely to be the case for organizations working in highly politicised areas.

By contrast, other organizations may be less interested in, or adept at, reading their environment. Instead, they may be more preoccupied with the need to retain internal coherence and credibility vis-à-vis members. In this case, signals from politics may be only very patchily grasped and internalised, as the organization continues to pursue a highly self-referential course in terms of its goals and action. Alternatively, the organization may be interested in reading signals from other actors in its environment, such as practitioners, lobby groups or clients. Nonetheless, the outcome is the same: the organization shuts itself off from political signals, unable or unwilling to respond to external political pressure.

A second factor influencing responses to political pressure is the strength of the organization's internal ideology. According to Brunsson, a strong ideology exists where the organization's members possess shared beliefs and values about the organization's role and goals; and where these ideas are "conclusive, complex and consistent", i.e. they provide quite clear and coherent guidance for action in different situations. (Brunsson 2002:16). The scope and complexity of this system of beliefs implies that members are likely to react to pressure from the environment in a similar way, drawing the same conclusions about necessary responses. This creates a paradoxical situation in terms of the organization's response to political pressure to change. On the one hand such organizations may be more resistant to changes that imply subversion of this ideology. On the other, once they have accepted the need for reform, they are also better placed to ensure the coherence of organizational change: members will tend to adjust their ideas and action in a similar way (Brunsson 1985: 122-3). So they may display a combination of stubborn adherence to certain goals; but a facility to adapt where this is perceived as necessary.

Thirdly, organizational responses may depend on how the organization typically seeks to derive external legitimacy. Here it is useful to introduce a distinction between organizations in institutional and in technical sectors (Scott and Meyer, 1992: 140). Organizations in technical sectors typically derive legitimacy from adjusting their output, and their performance is measured and evaluated in terms of products. By contrast, in institutional sectors, organizations tend to derive legitimacy through more symbolic adjustments to their formal structures and rhetoric. For such organizations, it may be sufficient to adopt the trappings of what are considered to be legitimate norms and structures, and to take decisions considered to be externally legitimate. The result is that there is often a substantial divergence between an organization's ascribed mandate and goals (its formal structure), and the norms, beliefs and practices that guide the actions of members (its informal structure) – a phenomenon that has been coined “institutional decoupling” (March and Olsen 1994). This form of decoupling can help an organization reconcile conflicting demands from its environment: it “enables organizations to maintain standardized, legitimating formal structures while their activities vary in response to practical considerations” (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 39).

Different combinations of these organizational characteristics are likely to yield divergent responses. Indeed, we can set out four types of responses that might characterize organizational responses.

1. *Full adaptation.* This refers to cases in which an organization fully internalizes and implements a programme advocated by politics. This is likely to apply to organizations that are highly politically responsive; and which have a relatively weak or unsettled organizational ideology. It may apply to organizations operating in both technical and institutional sectors.

2. *Evasion.* Under this scenario, the organization's strategy is to ignore pressure from its environment, or make only a minimal effort to respond. This is most likely to be the case for self-referential organizations that do not perceive themselves to be under intense pressure from politics; and organizations with a strong ideology, which motivates resistance to external pressure for change. It is also likely to characterize technical sectors, where there is limited scope for responding to external pressure through (merely) symbolic adjustments.
3. *Institutional Decoupling.* This is the scenario under which an organization responds to external political pressure, but through adjusting its formal structures rather than its internal practices. This may characterize the approach of a politically responsive organization, keen to demonstrate its compliance with external demands; but one that is operating in an institutional sector (i.e. requiring symbolic adjustment rather than changes to output). It may be compatible with either a strong or a weak organizational ideology.
4. *Reinterpretation.* In this case the organization responds to external pressure through reinterpreting the demands for action. In other words, it internalizes the requirement on its own terms, adapting the relevant programme to fit organizational priorities and goals. This is likely to be the case in organizations with strong ideologies, but which are sufficiently politically astute to accept the need for adjustment. Unlike in the case of institutional decoupling, this scenario implies quite extensive internalization of a new programme to guide organizational action.

Table 1 Organizational Responses to Political Pressure

Organizational Characteristics			
	Relationship to	Organizational	Source of

Type of Response		Political Environment	Ideology	Legitimation
	<i>Full adaptation</i>	Close	Weak	Either
	<i>Evasion</i>	Distant	Strong	Output
	<i>Decoupling</i>	Close	Strong	Symbolic
	<i>Reinterpretation</i>	Close	Strong	Either

These four scenarios are summarised in Table 1. They are ideal typical, in the sense that none is likely to be empirically observed in this pure form; rather, any organization is likely to display combinations of these patterns of behaviour. Moreover, the configuration of characteristics may change over time, leading to a switch from one scenario to another. Nonetheless, it is a useful typology for analysing European Commission responses to political pressure to implement the external dimension.

Integrating Migration Concerns into External Policy

European Union immigration and asylum policy was formally established under the 1994 Treaty of Maastricht, within the area of Cooperation on Justice and Home Affairs (JHA). In the early years, its focus was very much on harmonizing national asylum systems and reinforcing migration control at EU external borders. In the context of EU enlargement to the East, it also sought to “externalise” this restrictive approach through exporting EU policies to acceding and associated states (Grabbe 2003; Lavenex 2006). The notion that the Commission should integrate immigration

and asylum concerns into the EU's External Relations had been mooted since the early- mid-1990s, especially by the Commission department responsible for Justice and Home Affairs (at that time a Task Force, and later up-graded into DG Justice, Liberty and Security, or JLS). This notion of 'integration' implied extending the external dimension to other regions with whom the EU had established relations. It was also seen by many to embody a more progressive approach, implying a focus on mutual cooperation, rather than imposition; and on measures to address the causes of migration, rather than simply to restrict it.

The idea was first given real political clout by the special Tampere Council on JHA in October 1999. The Conclusions stressed the need for a "comprehensive approach to migration addressing political, human rights and development issues in countries and regions of origin and transit". It argued for "a greater coherence of internal and external policies of the Union", so that "all competences and instruments at the disposal of the Union, and in particular, in external relations must be used in an integrated and consistent way to build the area of freedom, security and justice. JHA concerns must be integrated in the definition and implementation of other Union policies and activities" (European Council 1999).

Since then, the Council has continued to place pressure on the Commission to integrate migration and asylum into external policy – through European Council conclusions in Feira (2000), Laeken (2001), Seville (2002) Thessaloniki (2003), and the Hague Programme (2004). More recently, in October 2005 held a special meeting of heads of state at Hampton Court, which called for urgent action to develop the external dimension. Political pressure has also come via the highly politicized Presidency of the Commission, which has applied varying degrees of pressures on DG

Commissioners to implement the new agenda. How have different parts of the Commission responded?

Tampere to Hampton Court

Directorate-General JLS was keen to embrace this agenda. Indeed, its response can be seen as approximating the ‘full adaptation’ scenario introduced above. In this respect, we should note that JLS was a relatively new department within the Commission, which was only established as a separate Directorate-General in 2001. Responsible for an emerging area of EU cooperation, the organization’s scope of competence was very much in flux, evolving with consecutive treaties and European Council Conclusions. It was also vying for control with other DGs with potential competence in this area, especially DG Employment and Social Affairs. So it was an organization oriented towards expansion, and keen to acquire new competences and financing. It was also operating in a highly politicized policy area, and thus needed to be responsive to political signals from its environment, especially if it was to gain expanded powers. Finally, the external dimension agenda was quite in fitting with its (albeit rather weak and fragmented) organizational ideology: it accorded with the DG’s generally progressive and long-termist approach to dealing with migration control. In fact, in comparison to traditional approaches to migration control, the idea of addressing migration through cooperation with countries of origin or transit was relatively enlightened and forward-looking. Not surprisingly, then, the DG welcomed calls for developing the external dimension of JHA. As one official from another DG put it, it was “a fantastic opportunity to raise the profile of DG JLS” (Interview, January 2007). In interviews with JLS officials, there was a clear sense of achievement that the question became so high-profile: “in general terms I’m rather

happy ... in the sense that migration as an issue is very much on the agenda of the EU.” (Interview, January 2007).

The reaction from DGs Relex and Development, however, was far more reticent. When I conducted interviews in Spring 2002, officials in both DGs appeared to be cautious about incorporating migration considerations into external relations. Yet there were interesting divergences between their responses. DG External Relations appeared to grasp the political importance of JHA and the external dimension earlier on. While hardly enthusiastic about the agenda, many within the organization felt the need to demonstrate a robust response. This was reflected in the organization’s formal structures. In early 2001, the organization appointed an official responsible for coordinating migration issues in the DG. This was then expanded over the next few years, with the appointment of a special focal point in each sub-regional unit. The designation of focal points was an established model for ensuring implementation of “cross-cutting issues”, such as environment or energy. In its rhetoric, too, the DG appeared quite committed to the agenda, in particular emphasizing the need to integrate migration questions into relations with Mediterranean region.

However, it should be stressed that on an informal level, staff within the DG continued to be resistant to the external dimension. Officials expressed various concerns about the impact of this agenda on relations with third countries. There was general scepticism about the level of competence and experience of home affairs officials in relation to questions of foreign policy and development. More generally, there was a resistance to the notion that migration issues might influence policy priorities within External Relations. As one official explained, Relex “don’t want to have an agenda imposed by DG JLS”. The DG coped with this partly through a

strategy of institutional decoupling, adopting the trappings of cooperation, whilst in practice trying to minimise the impact of the new agenda on its day-to-day practice. Part of this tactic involved trying to confine the external dimension to a rather narrow set of measures. The DG preferred to interpret Tampere and subsequent conclusions as requiring the developing of new, supplementary forms of cooperation, rather than redirecting existing Relex priorities. This implied the acceptance of a rather conservative interpretation of the external dimension, one that involved focusing on rather traditional approaches towards migration control, which would not interfere with Relex activities and resources. The onus would be on developing cooperation with third countries in the areas of illegal migration and trafficking, readmission arrangements and border controls, areas in which DG External Relation had no particular competence, and little interest. DG Relex would continue to conduct relations with third countries in other areas without any significant readjustment of priorities or resources.

At first sight, this implied a strategy of reinterpreting external political requirements to suit the organization's existing agenda. The interesting thing to note, though, is that the organization did not appear to be fundamentally concerned about the ideological implications of this strategy. As noted, the narrow interpretation of the external dimension implied focusing on a rather conservative and restrictive set of measures, rather than favouring the more progressive preventive approaches that both Tampere and DG JLS were seeking to promote (Boswell 2003). This implies that the organization was primarily interested in protecting its autonomy over external relations. This took precedence over the goal of promoting substantive policy outcomes. The DG appeared to prefer to let its colleagues in JLS pursue a more

conservative and restrictive approach in their attempts to externalize immigration and asylum, as long as this enabled Relex to retain autonomy.

Development officials, meanwhile, appeared to have been even more concerned about the potential subversion of existing policy goals. In 2002, one could observe a quite pronounced resistance to the idea of tailoring development strategies to the interests of migration goals. As one JHA official put it, introducing migration concerns into development appeared to imply “selling their souls”. This attitude was hardly surprising, if we consider the character of the organization. DG Development is committed to a strong and fairly coherent set of substantive policy goals. Such a reorientation of policy would have severely conflicted with organizational ideology. It would also have risked a serious loss of legitimation vis-à-vis the development community, which would have been extremely problematic for many officials in the organization. Moreover, as an organization operating in a relatively unpoliticised area, and interacting with a policy community with a strong and coherent development agenda, DG Development was less oriented towards responding to signals from politics. In comparison to Relex, the DG perceived itself to be under less political pressure to introduce relevant changes.

The result was that the DG’s strategy became one of trying to minimise interference by JHA in development policy. As one Development official put it, the organization’s response was to “stick its head in the sand” (Interview, March 2002). It also made far less of an effort to adjust its structures and rhetoric to adopt the trappings of compliance. In the words of one official, Commissioner Nielson “didn’t want anything to do with migration”. There was a small compromise in early 2002, when the DG appointed an official to coordinate migration issues, though just on a

part-time basis. But by and large, there was little progress, and a general tendency to try to minimize the impact of the new agenda on the DG's activities.

This reticence about integrating JHA goals is also reflected in the cautious tone of the communication issued later that year, which was jointly drafted by the three DGs. The Communication on “integrating migration issues in the EU's relations with third countries” did propose a number of innovations, including the elaboration of “migration clauses” for each third country, which would cover all relevant aspects of cooperation on immigration. But it stated that migration prevention should not involve “overturning” existing development approaches, but rather the adoption of measures that are complementary to them. The implication was that integration did not call for the readjustment of priorities, or conflict with current “generic development lines”. Instead, it would take the form of specially targeted measures, which required additional resources – a clear acknowledgement that it was not expected that Relex and Development divert existing funds to realising migration goals (Commission 2002). Even these cautious steps set out in the Communication were followed up in a very cursory manner by DG Development. For example, attempts to implement the migration clauses met “with half success. It worked depending on who was there, if they could use this material or not... So that was done, and then I must admit that since then not really that much happened.” (Interview, January 2007). This more cautious approach to the new agenda was echoed in subsequent documents and funding schemes over the next three years. The AENEAS Programme launched in 2004, for example, was “designed to provide a specific additional response to the needs of third countries and their efforts to manage migration effectively”, funding measures which were “specific and complementary to

operations financed under other Community development cooperation instruments” (European Parliament and Council Regulation, 10 March 2004).

The consequence was that DG JLS was largely frustrated in its attempts to implement the external dimension. It was keen to push ahead with the new agenda, but it could make limited progress without the cooperation of other DGs. In the case of DG Relex, resistance took the form of institutional decoupling. In Development, one can observe a more clear-cut case of evasion. As one JLS official commented of the inter-departmental cooperation over this period, the response from these DGs “was too weak. We were calling for help, but nobody responded” (Interview, January 2007).

After Hampton Court

Two developments appear to have coincided to give more momentum to this agenda in late 2005. The first and most obvious was the high-profile incidents of irregular entry of migrants into Spain in Summer 2005. Several hundred migrants from Africa attempted to enter the EU via the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco, and subsequently the Canary Islands. These events were the object of considerable media attention, and were interpreted by more populist parts of politics and the media as signifying a crisis of European immigration control. The UK presidency was keen to respond, and organized a special meeting in October 2005 of Heads of State to discuss the problem. This prompted the preparation of a so-called “Global Approach to Migration: Priority actions focusing on Africa and the Mediterranean”, which was adopted by the European Council in December 2005.

This was certainly not the first instance of a public furore over irregular entry into the EU. However, it fell upon the willing ears of a new and more centre-right Commission. José Manuel Barroso, instated as the new Commission President in

November 2004, was keen to move forward on areas of EU cooperation that he felt could enlist public support. The new Commissioners for DG JLS (Franco Frattini) and DG Relex (Benita Ferrero-Waldner) were also receptive to the agenda. Louis Michel, Commissioner for Development, was more reticent in the early stages, but appears to have embraced the migration agenda to a far greater degree than his predecessor Nielson. Indeed, it appears that Louis Michel came under considerable pressure from various European governments, especially France and Spain, who were keen to see progress in this area. The result was, as one official put it, that “at the highest level, the Commission has accepted this completely.... Barroso didn’t hesitate, Ferrero neither, Vice-President Frattini neither” (Interview, January 2007). Here was a clear case of an issue being pushed onto the political agenda through a series of high-profile incidents, but then being seized upon by the new Commission as a means of garnering support from EU governments and the public.

How far did this influence DGs Relex and Development? DG Relex, as we saw, had already made certain formal adjustments to indicate its alignment to the new agenda after 1999. It was active in a series of high level meetings after Autumn 2005, including inter-ministerial meetings in Rabat and Tripoli; and contributed to drafting the new Global Approach. But this reveals little about how far it adjusted its informal structures and practices. In fact, with a major spending review coming up in 2006-7, the DG had the opportunity to more systematically incorporate migration into its programmes with third countries. The main component of this programming consisted of Country Strategy Papers, setting out priorities for each country for the period 2007-13; and National Indicative Programmes, which defined areas of cooperation. But the integration of migration issues has been patchy. As a member of the DG conceded, the department had failed to adopt a systematic approach to incorporating migration

issues, with the result that “the flexible and practical point of view has prevailed” (Interview, January 2007). Another official outside of DG Relex complained that “there is no Relex position on migration as such, they’re all geographical desks”; the implication was that the approach was too piecemeal and fragmented.

There has also been irritation about funding. DG Relex made a vague promise to spending “up to 3 %” of the budget under its European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument on migration-related projects. But this tentative promise was seen by other DGs as a lack of commitment. As one DG Relex official put it, the organization “didn’t like the idea of having their hands already tied in that way” (Interview, January 2007). So there has generally been disappointment about the DG’s lukewarm response. As one official put it, “I guess they were sort of satisfied a few years ago, saying OK, there’s nothing that needs to be done on top of this.” (Interview, January 2007).

DG Development, by contrast, made a number of quite significant adjustments, and is generally considered to have undergone a major shift in its position after Summer 2005. As one official in Development remarked, “It’s totally different now.” The events of Summer 2005 initiated “a whole series of actions” to implement the external dimension. To be sure, the DG did not make any radical adjustments to its organizational structure. But the previously part-time post of focal point for migration was up-graded, and two new staff were brought in to form a new “Cellule”. This unit was tasked with coordinating the integration of migration issues into the new European Development Fund cycle of 2008-13. As in the case of Relex, programming for each country was set out in a Country Strategy Paper. Each country desk was issued with guidelines for incorporating migration issues, and for developing a “Migration Profile” where relevant (similar to the concept of “migration

clause” initially proposed in the 2002 Communication). Meanwhile, Commissioner Louis Michel earmarked a budget of € 90 million to be spent on migration issues. All of this was the object of strong approval by JLS.

What explains this apparently Damascus type conversion? The account favoured by officials outside DG Development is that Louis Michel had become persuaded of the importance of the external dimension. Partly under pressure from EU governments and the Commission President, partly as a reflection of his own ideological leanings, he began to see the importance of integrating migration concerns into his DG’s activities. As one official commented, “for Michel, migration has suddenly become one of his babies.” Unlike his predecessor Neilson, he was considered to be sufficiently astute enough to adapt his organization’s goals to reflect this new priority.

However, the staff in DG Development tell a rather different story.

Louis Michel is a liberal – a real old-fashioned liberal – so for him, basically, there shouldn’t be any borders, everybody should be able to live where he or she wants to live, that’s his ideal world. He doesn’t want to talk about migration, he wants to talk about mobility, mobility is an objective, an aim. And in 50 years from now we should have this idea world, like we have with the EU at the moment, where people can just work and live where they like to. (Interview, January 2007)

As the Commissioner intoned in his speech at the EU-Africa Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development in Tripoli:

We all know that labour mobility is one of the origin forces behind economic growth. It is one of the factors underlying the success of the European integration process, and should be the starting point for any African regional development strategy. This – and nothing else – should guide our thinking on the subject of migration. (Michel, 2006).

This is a far cry from the migration control agenda being advocated by EU heads of state and DG JLS. But if one looks more closely at DG Development's practical attempts to integrate migration issues, these are quite consistent with the Commissioner's more liberal agenda. For a start, all of the programmes involving migration-related goals under the new EDF must, by definition, be "DAC-able". In other words, they must fall within the definition of what constitutes Overseas Development Aid, and more specifically fit the priorities of the Millennium Development Goals. The implication is that the integration of migration issues into the Country Strategy Papers can only be on the condition that this meets already defined development goals. There is no scope for diverting EDF money to promote migration management goals as defined by DG JLS or the European Council. The same is true of the €90 million funds earmarked by DG Development for migration-related goals. As one official put it, this "is a virtual fund. It's constructed, it doesn't exist.... So it's really for political purposes. This is EDF money. You can give it any label you like" (Interview, January 2007). The organization seems to have found a way of interpreting the external dimension that fits its agenda.

This has been facilitated by an increasing overlap between EDF and the goals of the external dimension. As we saw, the 2002 Communication on migration and development had already advocated an approach that was sensitive to the development priorities of sending and transit countries (Commission 2002). The 2005 Communication adopted a similar approach, stressing that "links between migration and development offer a significant potential for furthering development goals, without constituting a substitute to enhanced Official Development Assistance" (Commission 2005). The document focused on possible development measures that could help alleviate migratory pressures, such as employment creation. It also

discussed ways in which migration could enhance development, through the more effective channelling of migrant remittances, tapping resources of the diaspora, promoting circular migration, reversing the brain drain, and so forth. This more sensitive approach to third country concerns was reinforced in the Commission's Global Strategy paper, produced in response to the Hampton Court meeting, as well as the follow-up paper a year later. These documents even recognised the need to explore possibilities for expanding legal migration possibilities for nationals of African and Mediterranean countries.

Officials in DG JLS located the source of this shift in an increasing awareness of the need to take into account the concerns of third countries. Indeed, this failure to consider interests was seen as one of the reasons for the floundering of earlier attempts at garnering support for migration control measures. Third countries would hardly sign up to Commitments on border controls or implement readmission agreements if they were not receiving some sort of benefit. Thus an integral feature of the new Global Approach was the focus on a "package" approach to the external dimension, which, in the Commission jargon, could create a "win-win" situation for the EU and third countries. As one official succinctly put it, "Migration is there, we have to manage it to the extent possible, but it can only be done if the two sides ... have a joint advantage in all of this" (Interview, January 2007). It was also seen as a shift towards a more ethical approach: "it's not longer an agenda on fighting illegal immigration. We're playing fair, we're ready to discuss visa issues, integration of people".

This package approach certainly suited DG Development. As a JLS official observed, "Development love it. Development came out when we were drafting this and said they really like it. They're really in favour of it. For the first time we're

offering something to third countries in return”. A Development official gave a more precise reason for this positive response. Many of the African countries with whom the DG had cooperated most closely on migration issues in 2006 already had a tradition of migration programmes with countries such as France or Spain. This made it easier to combine requests to improve migration control with a promise of more generous terms for legal migration. Where such possibilities exist, “it’s easier for Louis Michel with his political philosophy to work on that basis, to expand it”. (Interview, January 2007).

While this “package approach” may have made it easier for Development to reconcile the external dimension with its organizational ideology, this was almost certainly at the expense of programmatic coherence. The Global Approach now brought together several quite different and potentially contradictory strands: restricting irregular migration and preventing migration flows, whilst trying to maximise the acknowledged positive impacts of emigration on development, and promote intra-regional mobility; creating possibilities for selective legal migration (including skilled migration), whilst trying to counter the detrimental effects of the “brain drain”; promoting the reception of refugees in regions of origin, whilst acknowledging the destabilizing effects of refugee influx on poor and conflict-ridden countries. Some of the contradictions were acknowledged by Commission officials. There was particular concern about the question of brain drain. While DG JLS officials working on the external dimension were exploring ways of counteracting the often devastating development effects of loss of skilled labour, another Unit within the DG was bringing forward plans for an EU Directive on the recruitment of skilled labour migration. As one official observed, “We don’t seem to talk about brain drain in the same sentence”. The attitude in Development was more cynical: “We pay lip-

service to it, but then it stops, because we're still trying to get the best brains to Europe". (Interview, January 2007). Yet these contradictions seem to have been essential to enlisting support for the Global Approach – both on the part of African countries, and DG Development. The package contained something for everyone.

In this respect, it is worth noting Peter Hall's observations about the "deliberate malintegration" of different policy goals. Hall argues that states – and we can extend this to refer to public administrations in general – may find it expedient to deal with conflicting interests through intentional fudging of policy.

A state faced with multiple tasks and well-defined conflicts of interest among the social classes it governs, or the groups within these, may find it necessary to maintain a degree of deliberate malintegration among its various policy-making aims so that each can mobilize consent among its particular constituencies by pursuing policies which, even if never fully implemented, appear to address the needs of these groups. In many cases the pursuit of incompatible policies renders all of them ineffective; but this strategy prevents any one group from claiming that the state has come down on the side of its opponents (cited in Held and Krieger, 1984:17-18).

The implication is that DG Development's support was enlisted, but at the cost of policy coherence. The DG was able to internalize those parts of the agenda that were in accord with its existing ideology. This implied a fairly selective reading of the "package" of measures being proposed. It also encouraged the inclusion of a number of new goals that had little to do with the migration management agenda. Abandoning its initial strategy of evasion, then, from around Summer 2005 onwards the organization began to favour the internalization of the external dimension agenda, but with a quite substantial reinterpretation of the original goals and logic of this approach. DG Development was able to put its weight behind the agenda once it had made sure this was compatible with its organizational ideology.

Conclusions: Bureaucracies and Policy Change

The analysis of organizational responses to the external dimension has several implications for theories of policy-making. The first of these relates to theories of organizational action. It was suggested at the beginning of the article that prevalent rationalist accounts of policy change in the administration were too simplistic in attributing a uniform set of interests to organizations. Instead, organizations do not always act in what external observers would consider to be a rational way, to expand their competence or achieve specified policy goals. They are often more concerned about retaining internal legitimacy, or ensuring the retention of a coherent organizational ideology. This was certainly the case with DG Development's initial response to the external dimension. For a number of not very "rational" reasons, the organization preferred to keep its head in the sand and ignore signals from politics. Such a response could not be inferred from any generalizable claims about rationality.

This implies the need to examine a range of different sorts of factors shaping organizational responses. I suggested that three variables are particularly relevant: the organization's political astuteness; the strength of its internal ideology; and its mode of deriving legitimation. These characteristics were likely to yield four different types of response to political pressure: full adaptation, evasion, institutional decoupling, and reinterpretation. In the case explored in this article, the three DGs displayed features of all four of these types of response. JLS can be characterized as fully adapting to the new demands; Relex as a case of institutional decoupling; and Development as shifting from evasion to reinterpretation.

The most interesting contrast was between the cases of Relex and Development. Rationalist theories would predict that these two organizations would adopt rather similar responses. However, as a politically astute organization deriving legitimacy largely from formal structures, Relex was content to adopt its formal structures and rhetoric, whilst failing to adjust its practice. This attitude persisted even in the face of quite considerable frustration and pressure from its environment. Arguably, the DG now risks a loss of legitimacy if it continues to fail to respond to these signals. Development, as we saw, was initially evasive. However, a combination of greater political pressure and an opportunity to reconfigure the political agenda meant that it managed to develop a rather clever strategy of selectively incorporating the new approach. This internalization was more than symbolic: it implied the full incorporation of a new approach, but one that had been adapted to ensure consistency with the organization's ideology. A key variable explaining this divergence appears to be the strength and coherence of ideologies in the respective organizations. Once Development accepted the need to act, it was able to mobilize organizational adjustment in a way that made sense to members. Relex, by contrast, was blocked by a general resistance to accepting orders from the outside, but lacked norms that could provide guidance on ways of interpreting the agenda. It therefore adopted a far more piecemeal and symbolic approach to internalizing the new agenda.

The second set of implications concerns the role of administrative organizations in explaining policy change. I would contend that the types of organizational dynamics explored in this article do not merely pose a challenge to rationalist theories of bureaucracies. They also imply that administrative organizations can have an important role in influencing policy outcomes. The initial reluctance of DG Relex and Development to implement the new agenda all but blocked progress on

integrating immigration into External Relations in the initial phase, i.e. 2000-2005. Meanwhile, DG Development in particular played an important role in shifting the approach to incorporate the concerns of developing countries. It is unlikely that the Global Approach and the more development-oriented approach would have emerged without the engagement of DG Development. So any explanation of the external dimension needs to factor in the role of organizational dynamics within the Commission.

The outcome of this process of reconfiguring the external dimension was a rather incoherent jumble of policy goals in the form of the Global Approach. This lack of coherence should not come as a surprise to scholars of organizational sociology. Indeed, “deliberate malintegration” is quite a normal feature of policy making. Rather than representing a failing, it can serve the goal of enlisting support from different parts of the administration and its constituents. It can be a quite reasonable strategy for coping with conflict, but again, one that belies standard rationalist approaches.

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